

Tween Wins National Honors for Fundraising Work

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By Michelle Perras-Charron

Ella Morrison of Middleborough has taken the age-old saying, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade,” and flipped it on its head. Using her lemonade stand, [Ella’s Lemonade Shop](#), the 12-year-old has raised \$50,000 over the past five years to support childhood cancer research.

For her efforts, she was recently named a national winner of the 2017 [Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes](#). Each year, the Barron Prize celebrates 25 inspiring, public-spirited young people from across North America who have made a positive difference to people and the environment. Morrison is one of the Top 20 winners, who will each receive a \$5,000 cash award to support their service work or higher education.

“I’m just helping kids,” she notes modestly. It is her hope that money raised from her lemonade stand will fund research that will someday find a cure for all cancers, especially pediatric, which impacted her at a young age. In 2012, when Morrison was 6, her best friend, Hailey Olson, was diagnosed with an inoperable brain tumor. To support her friend, Morrison decided to open a lemonade stand in her front yard. She earned \$88 her first summer, which she used to buy Hailey a doll and treat her to lunch. The following year, Hailey passed away. Fast-forward five years: Morrison has raised \$50,000. Instead of a small table in her front yard, Ella’s Lemonade Shop is now housed in her father’s mobile work trailer so it can regularly travel to the local farmer’s market and other community events, says Gina Morrison, Ella’s mother.

“I think it’s crazy how it started out and where it is today,” she says. “Once she realized what good this could do for other kids, not just Hailey, she wanted to continue to do it.”

Ella’s Lemonade Shop, which is open year-round, sells much more than lemonade, offering snow cones, popcorn, apple cider in the fall, and hot chocolate during the winter.

“It’s definitely a lot of work,” says Gina Morrison. “But it’s meaningful to all of us.”

“I’m her biggest fan,” adds Hilary Olson, Hailey’s mother. “Anytime they do fundraisers, I’m there.”

Olson, who still lives down the street from the Morrisons, says Hailey and Ella met at daycare when they were 9 months old. From there, they attended preschool and elementary school together, and continued to be best friends. Around the same time Hailey was diagnosed with cancer, two other children at their elementary school were also diagnosed, Olson notes.

“It’s crazy,” Olson says about the amount of money raised to date through Ella’s Lemonade Shop. “I love this town, the people in this community are just amazing.”

In addition to donating proceeds to childhood cancer research, Morrison and her family have also purchased restaurant and gasoline gift cards for the parents of pediatric cancer patients.

They have also arranged collection drives at her school. Working together, she and her school donated 700 pairs of pajamas and 300 Lego sets to Boston Children’s Hospital in recent years.

Morrison hopes to use part of her prize money to help set up and organize future events to support pediatric cancer patients. She says she most enjoys meeting new people and learning about other kids when she’s out in the community working at the stand.

“I see really, really big things for her in the future,” Olson adds. “And I’m just so excited to be a part of it.”

Gina Morrison knows that her daughter’s ongoing quest to help children with cancer is no easy feat, but says her family will continue to support Ella’s mission as long as wants to do it: “It’s not about the lemonade. It’s about the cause.”

Michelle Perras-Charron is a freelance writer and mother to four boys in Western Massachusetts. A Navy brat and also the wife of a retired Air Force captain, she loves writing about people and all topics related to parenting.